

## **Howard County Board to Promote Self-Sufficiency Annual Report: 2014**

The mission of the Board to Promote Self-Sufficiency, created by County legislation in 2009, is to **reduce the incidence of poverty in Howard County by acting as a planning and coordinating body for initiatives that promote the economic stability of individuals and families.** A challenge for any community, this complex mission is being addressed in various ways by government, non-profits and community groups. The Board's unique role allows for greater collaboration and an evaluation of the impact of those efforts in our community.

The Board's accomplishments over the past five years are a testament to the dedication of its members and their understanding of poverty in a Howard County context. With a fluid committee structure that responds to the current climate, the work of the Board has yielded significant efforts over the years. Notably –

- the adoption of the County's Plan to End Homelessness, with substantive work to that end over the past two years;
- the establishment of a Voluntary Income Tax Assessment site at the MultiService Center in southeast Howard County that assists low income families with their tax returns and accessing Earned Income Tax Credits;
- the creation of a unique apprenticeship program that allows low wage workers to nearly double their income after completion;
- adoption of the Bridges Out of Poverty (BOP) model, which provides a framework for service providers to examine how they view and treat those in poverty, kicked off by an initial community-wide training program attended by nearly 200 people; and
- implementation of an on-going series of "Getting Ahead" groups, based on the BOP model, that enable people in poverty to investigate the effects of poverty on their personal resources and what it takes to improve those resources.

The Board has also lent support to initiatives that align with its mission. For example, it

- provided testimony in support of the First Class breakfast initiative in 2011 to bring breakfast to those schools that have high participation in the Free and Reduced Meals program, which was passed, and
- in 2013, supported the planning and development of a Small Efficiency Apartment building to house 35 chronically homeless individuals and a new Day Resource center, which is now scheduled for ground breaking in 2015.

### **2014 Highlights and Accomplishments**

This past year marked a maturing of the Board, which resulted in a three-year strategic plan that rallied the members around their role, scope of work and a plan to move forward. Patty Keeton, Executive Director/Workforce Development for Howard Community College, chaired the Board and shepherded the strategic planning process, which produced clear goals, affirmed the

mission statement, and articulated a vision statement of **Howard County as a community where those in need have opportunities and pathways for getting ahead.**

The timing for this planning was particularly significant, with the economy emerging from the recession and the Board growing into its mission and focus. The planning process led to the repositioning of key efforts of the Board and a challenge to look deeper at the issues that systematically undermine stability for households in Howard County. The Board will use the plan to guide its focus in the coming year under the leadership of Mike Couch, Executive Director of MakingChange, who is the new Board chair.

Board members participated in a facilitated daylong retreat in February to evaluate the efforts of the previous years and chart a course for moving forward in a 3-year strategic plan. While the current climate will always be a key influence each year, the following four guiding principles were identified to guide the Board's work:

1. Maximize the unique opportunity for collective impact;
2. Promote planning and decision making that is guided by the people being served;
3. Focus on prevention and creating pathways to long-term stability; and
4. Be informed by reliable data and best practices.

The goals identified in the strategic plan are to 1.) Maximize the effectiveness of the Board's work to address the needs of low-income families and individuals; 2.) Identify, facilitate and incubate initiatives and systems-change efforts that will help those in crisis and provide new opportunities to move out of poverty; and 3.) Create and maintain effective and responsive mechanisms to communicate the work and achievements of the Board both internally and externally. These are overarching and will provide an important context to the Board's scope and approach to issues it will address.

The Plan to End Homelessness, created by the Committee to End Homelessness and adopted by the Board in 2010, is now a County priority that is in its third year of receiving resources. The strategies and vision of the Plan are operationalized in County departments and non-profits in the community. As a result of this significant accomplishment the committee ended its formal role as a committee of the Board in December 2013. The committee led, for over five years, by Jane O'Leary Executive Director of Bridges to Housing Stability, became a community-wide effort that was sophisticated, had depth and the commitment of numerous volunteers and key stakeholders. The Board's role as the Continuum of Care Board for Howard County, and the fact that many Board members play a significant role in the Plan, will allow it to continue to stay intimately involved with the progress.

The Employment and Financial Stability Committees, after years of bringing together significant partners for each of those areas and specific accomplishments, concluded their committees in anticipation of the Board focusing its efforts going forward on new initiatives that were identified as part of an assessment of community needs this past summer. The Employment Committee awarded the first Hire Power Awards in April, acknowledging businesses in Howard County that have programs and/or hiring practices that help low wage workers gain and retain

employment. **Allen & Shariff, Coastal Sunbelt Produce, Columbia Association, Mobern Lighting and Sims Recycling** received certificates from the County Executive and were encouraged to continue to look for ways to alleviate barriers for low wage workers to retain employment. The initiatives which were the focus of the Financial Stability Committee, including the Family Self-Sufficiency program in the Department of Housing, the Individual Development Account Savings Match program at Community Action Council, and the expansion of the youth savings initiative through the Howard County Public School System's In-School Banking program in elementary schools, will all continue to operate in these organizations to promote financial stability in the community.

Momentum of the Getting Ahead Committee grew throughout the year. A second community training of the Bridges Out of Poverty model was held, with over 130 staff and advocates attending. Eight Getting Ahead groups for people in poverty were held in 2014, bringing the total to nine; 92 individuals have graduated the (typically) eight week program to-date. Data collected from the most recent groups shows that in the short time span of their group sessions, more than 30% of graduates reported improving their quality of life, 20% increased their support systems outside of their family members, and 20% improved their overall health. Participants also reported increased awareness of existing community support services, as well as greater ability and effort to avoid crisis situations. While the majority of participants maintained stability in their living situation, there were only marginal increases made in ability to meet expenses and start a savings account – not surprising given the timeframe. The focus in the next year for Getting Ahead will be identifying “next steps” for graduates to continue on their path to achieving their goals. A Leadership Howard County Premier class learning team is investigating the feasibility of the Circles, USA model for Howard County and will present their findings in the Spring of 2015.

The Evaluation and Resource Allocation Committee delved into community data through the year, ranked the projects put forth in the Continuum of Care application for Howard County and proactively evaluated the best use of state and federal funds as they align and complement local resources.

The need for the newly formed Community Outreach Committee was identified in the strategic plan. The committee is being formed with key community members and has identified the work plan, which will achieve the committee's goal of informing and engaging community stakeholders about the work of the Board.

In August the Board reached out to the larger community to strengthen its efforts on the challenges and barriers to economic stability faced by residents and to stay informed of the local challenges to Howard County residents. The Board undertook an assessment of community needs, implementing a community-wide survey completed by clients that have accessed services, service providers and stakeholders. More than 230 respondents provided feedback on key barriers to stability: access to food, employment, transportation, affordable housing, access to healthcare and affordable childcare. The survey results showed 50% or more of respondents felt there were improvements in employment and training, food

accessibility and access to healthcare and 40% or less of respondents observed improvements to childcare, housing and transportation. See appendix A for complete survey results. In the late Fall the Board began further work on specific outcomes from the survey results.

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### **Funding Recommendations**

The Board strongly recommends that the County continue its support of significant Board efforts. Funding for the Plan to End Homelessness provides the following critical services: case management, service coordination, flexible financial assistance, employment supports, addiction treatment, a housing locator, a landlord program, the United Way family stability initiatives and the continuation and expansion of the local housing subsidy program. Funding for the Getting Ahead program supports continued agency training and the facilitation of the Getting Ahead groups. The Board also supports the ongoing pre-development study for the Nonprofit Center which would benefit the community by improving coordination of services that promote economic stability. Any additional project funding requests for the Nonprofit Center will be reviewed when they are available.

### **Looking Ahead**

The Evaluation and Resource Allocation Committee will continue looking across the landscape of resources as they impact client outcomes locally, the Getting Ahead Committee will support a path for graduates to further their growth, and the Community Outreach Committee will expand business partnerships and award the 2015 Hire Power Awards. Careful consideration will be given to new focus areas and the establishing of committees as the results of the community survey are incorporated in the Board's work. Most importantly in 2015, systems level thinking and the collective impact of the Board will overlay efforts to promote the economic stability and self-sufficiency for families and individuals in Howard County.

## Board Membership

The BPSS is made up of key stakeholders from the public and private sectors. The 2014 Board members include:

Association of Community Services	FEI Systems
Joan Driessen	Stephen Martin
Bridges to Housing Stability	Community Outreach Committee, Chair
Jane O’Leary	Grassroots Crisis Intervention
Community Action Council	Andrea Ingram
Bitá Dayhoff	Glen Mar United Methodist Church
Community Advocate	Matt Poole
Lisa Jablonover	Health Department
Getting Ahead Committee, Co-Chair	Ronna Gotthainer
Department of Citizen Services	Howard Community College
Lois Mikkila	Patricia Keeton
Getting Ahead Committee, Co-chair	Howard County Public School System
Department of Corrections	Diane Martin
Jack Kavanagh	MakingChange
Department of Housing and Community	Mike Couch
Development – Tom Carbo	Board Chair
Board Vice-Chair	Mental Health Authority
Department of Social Services	Donna Wells
Karen Butler	Office of Workforce Development
Evaluation & Resource Allocation, Chair	Fran Trout
E-structors/Sims Recycling Solutions	PNC Bank
Julie Keough	Richard Ohnmacht

## **Appendix A – The Board to Promote Self-Sufficiency – Environmental Scan Results**

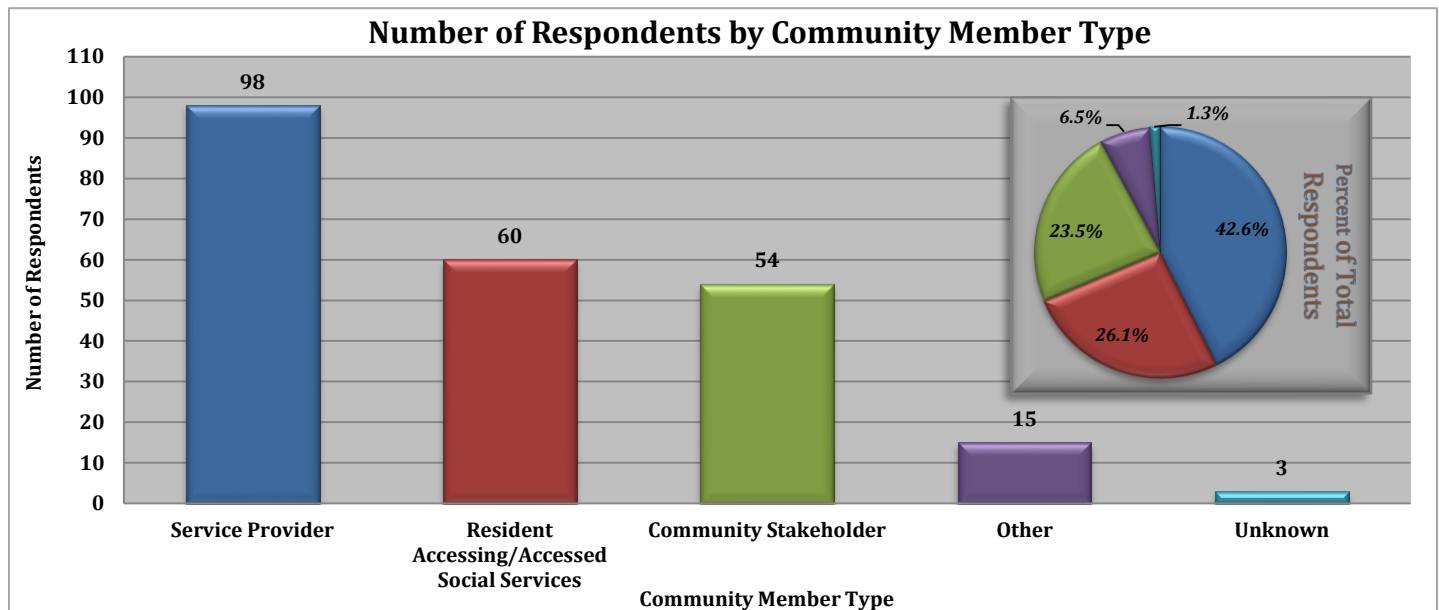
(Prepared by Howard County Department of Citizen Services, Danielle Goodwin, Human Services Analyst, Sept. 2014)

Howard County's Board to Promote Self Sufficiency (BPSS) conducted an online survey<sup>1</sup> between July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014 and August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014 seeking input from persons living in Howard County who have accessed or are currently accessing services in Howard County, service providers in Howard County, and community stakeholder interested in self-sufficiency of Howard County families and individuals. The open-ended survey asked respondents to provide feedback regarding the following barriers critical to economic stability of households in Howard County:

- Lack of employment and/or training opportunities
- Inadequate transportation
- Lack of affordable housing
- Access to comprehensive healthcare
- Access to sufficient food
- Lack of affordable childcare

The survey link was sent out through various agencies and outlets in Howard County including the Association of Community Services, the Coordinated System of Homeless Services and all BPSS member organizations. The survey yielded 231 survey responses. According to the data, 43% of respondents were service providers, 26% were residents accessing or have accessed social services in Howard County, 24% were community stakeholders, 7% identified themselves as other, and 1% did not identify themselves.

**Figure 1: Number of Respondents by Community Member Type**

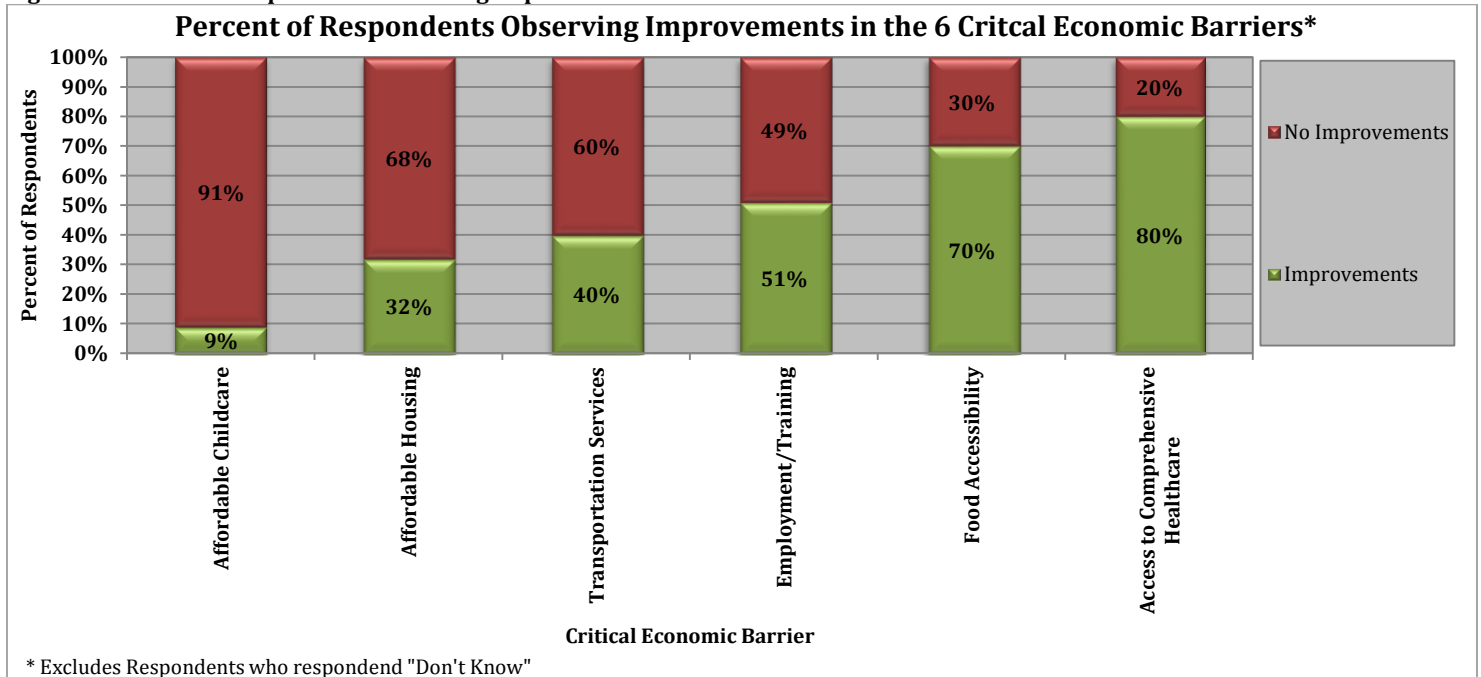


<sup>1</sup> Paper surveys were available to those who did not have access to the internet at non-profits and County agencies serving clients including the MultiService Center.

## Improvements by Barrier

The 231 respondents taking the survey were asked if they observed improvements within the last five years regarding each of the 6 critical economic barriers identified by Howard County's BPSS. The respondents had the option of choosing "yes", "no", and "don't know." Figure 2 shows the percent of respondents identifying that improvements have been observed within the last five years regarding the economic barriers. Figure 2 excludes all respondents who answered "don't know."

**Figure 2: Percent of Respondents Observing Improvements in the 6 Critical Economic Barriers**



According to the survey results of those respondents responding "yes" or "no" to observing improvements in the 6 critical economic barriers, affordable childcare had the lowest percent (9%) of respondents stating they observed improvements in childcare within the last 5 years. Affordable housing and transportation services had the second and third lowest, with 32% and 40% witnessing improvements within the last 5 years, respectively. Access to comprehensive healthcare and food accessibility had the highest response to improvements witnessed in the last 5 years with 80% and 70% of respondents saying they observed improvements, respectively. Lastly, over 50% of respondents said they observed improvements within employment and training in the last five years.

## **Improvements by Community Member Type**

In general, service providers and community stakeholders were MORE likely to state they observed improvements within the 6 economic barriers, while residents living in Howard County accessing or have accessed social services were LEAST likely to state they observed improvements. In most cases the percent of respondents observing improvements within each community member type varies only slightly, except when it comes to affordable housing and employment/training. Both service providers and community stakeholders have observed improvements in greater numbers than persons living in Howard County accessing services or have accessed services. Please refer to table 1 for the percent of respondents observing improvements by community member type.

**Table 1: Percent of Respondents Observing Improvements by Community Member Type<sup>2</sup>**

	Service Provider	Community Stakeholder	Person Living in Howard County
Affordable Childcare	13%	22%	0%
Affordable Housing	32%	48%	16%
Transportation Services	42%	32%	39%
Employment/Training	66%	48%	29%
Food Accessibility	67%	78%	69%
Access to Comprehensive Healthcare	87%	81%	71%

<sup>2</sup> The data was calculated using only respondents who answered "yes" or "no" to observing improvements in the 6 economic barriers, the data excludes those who responded "don't know."



## Improvements and Suggestions

In order to provide a quick snapshot of the surveys open-ended results, all responses were categorized into more general responses, where possible. In some instances, individual's responses were categorized multiple times due to the depth and breadth of their response. Table 3 lists the top 5 improvements observed by respondents and the top 5 suggestions for improvements by respondents. It's important to understand that the improvement categories are general and in several cases, respondents further detailed ways to implement new programing, change existing programming, and even detailed their own personal experiences. In addition to listing the top responses, the number of respondents whose responses were categorized are listed prior to general category. It should be noted that food accessibility and childcare suggestions for improvements varied significantly thus not all being able to be categorized.

**Table 3: Top 5 Improvements and Top 5 Suggestions for Improvement by Respondents**

	Top 5 Improvements		Top 5 Suggestions for Improvement	
Affordable Childcare	1 respondent	Issuing more vouchers	14 respondents	More vouchers/subsidies
	1 respondent	Data says it's improving	10 respondents	Lower Childcare costs for moderate income families
	1 respondent	Elementary school model for Pre-K	10 respondents	Increase income requirement for subsidies/vouchers
			8 respondents	Lower childcare costs (affordable)
			5 respondents	Support childcare providers including providing incentives
Affordable Housing	12 respondents	Increase in additional affordable housing	54 respondents	Need more low to moderate income housing (affordable)
	7 respondents	Better mechanisms requiring income qualifications	14 respondents	Increase rental subsidies/vouchers
	6 respondents	Increase in redevelopment, development, and preservation of affordable housing	12 respondents	Increase/better education and outreach efforts
	6 respondents	Bridges Alliance	10 respondents	Increase/better housing for persons with disabilities
	5 respondents	Bridges to Housing Stability	9 respondents	Better enforcement of County policies regarding providing affordable housing
Transportation Services	10 respondents	Increase in number or frequency of buses	57 respondents	Need more routes/increase coverage
	8 respondents	Additional bus routes and/or stops	29 respondents	Need more comprehensive public transit system
	6 respondents	Better regional transit	20 respondents	Need more frequent buses or transportation
	6 respondents	More public transportation sources and services available	18 respondents	Increase hours of public transportation
	4 respondents	Neighbor ride	13 respondents	Better bus schedules and wait times
	4 respondents	Improvements in HT Ride		

	Top 5 Improvements		Top 5 Suggestions for Improvement	
Employment/ Training	28 respondents	Increase in the number of training/programming opportunities	29 respondents	Better Information and outreach efforts
	11 respondents	Increase in businesses, non-profits, and government offering training opportunities (better integration of services)	17 respondents	Better transportation to employment and training opportunities
	9 respondents	Increase in the number of employment opportunities within the region	17 respondents	Need more training or supplemental training
	8 respondents	Work Force Development Center	15 respondents	Increase the number of partnerships, coalitions, and connections
	7 respondents	Increase in communication/outreach on training and employment opportunities	13 respondents	Increase opportunities including training for those with disabilities
Food Accessibility	12 respondents	Additional network of food pantries	7 respondents	Better transportation to access food
	11 respondents	Roving Radish	7 respondents	More access to food stamps or other food assistance programs
	7 respondents	Church sponsored food banks	5 respondents	More affordable healthy food options
	6 respondents	There has been better outreach and public relations	5 respondents	Increase the number of farmers markets
	5 respondents	Increase in farmers markets	5 respondents	Increase food delivery services
	5 respondents	Better school food options	5 respondents	Increase outreach efforts
	5 respondents	Increase in food bank drives and donations	5 respondents	Increase food collection efforts for an increase in donations
Access to Comprehensive Healthcare	32 respondents	Affordable Care Act (ACA)	23 respondents	Improve outreach, education, and application assistance
	25 respondents	Healthy Howard	8 respondents	Increase the number of health clinics/health programs
	10 respondents	Better outreach and application assistance	7 respondents	Better accessibility
	9 respondents	Creation of Chase Brexton	7 respondents	Better mental health programs
	5 respondents	Connectors	5 respondents	Better transportation to access health
			5 respondents	Improve language barrier issues

### **The significance of “Don’t know” responses**

While “don’t know” responses were eliminated from some of the analysis, it’s important to note that some barriers received more “don’t know” responses than others when responding to improvements observed within the last 5 years. The reason for this is due to barriers affecting people at various stages of their lives. The best example is childcare. Childcare received 111 “don’t know” responses when asked if they witnessed improvements in affordable childcare. If the respondent does not have a child in childcare or does not work with residents with childcare issues they then are more inclined to respond “don’t know.” Table 2 list the six barriers with the number of don’t know responses. Note the “don’t know” responses become greater when the barrier is targeted to specific stages or situations in life.

**Table 2: Don't know responses by economic barrier**

<b>Economic Barrier</b>	<b>Number of “don’t know” responses to improvements observed</b>
<b>Affordable Housing</b>	47
<b>Access to Comprehensive Healthcare</b>	51
<b>Transportation Services</b>	56
<b>Food accessibility</b>	72
<b>Employment/Training Opportunities</b>	99
<b>Affordable Childcare</b>	111